

Dear Governor Snyder,

As a group of academic scientists who have expertise in the conservation and management of natural resources, we are writing to urge you to veto Senate Bill 78. SB78 modifies Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to prohibit state agencies from managing state land for the purpose of maintaining biological diversity. The bill subsequently alters the definition of conservation, emphasizing the need for more extraction and economic gain from public resources, and it eliminates a requirement that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manage ecosystems like forests in a manner that ensures their recovery.

SB78 ignores a large body of scientific evidence that has shown conservation of biological diversity is crucial for maintaining healthy, sustainable ecosystems. Ecosystems with a greater variety of species are generally more efficient and productive, are better able to resist invasions and outbreaks by economically damaging pests and disease, and are more stable in the face of environmental change.

For example, recent summaries of the scientific literature show that forests with a greater variety of tree species produce significantly more wood than forests with fewer species. Diverse forests may also be better able to resist invasive species, and minimize the frequency of outbreaks of economically damaging pests and diseases - pests and disease much like the Emerald Ash Borer, or Sudden Oak Death that kill commercially important trees here in Michigan. Biodiversity is so fundamentally important for healthy forests that both independent organizations that certify Michigan's forestry practices (the Forest Stewardship Council, and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative) explicitly require biodiversity conservation to be included in state management plans. SB 78 not only puts the sustainability of our public lands at risk, it puts state forestry certifications, and the economic gains that are realized from these certifications, at risk.

We share concerns of other groups who have emphasized additional social and cultural values of biodiversity, such as for tourism and recreation, both of which are major economic forces in our state. We also echo concerns that passing SB 78 will be widely perceived as banning the use of solid science in management, and has potential to discredit Michigan's recent progress towards becoming a leader in environmental stewardship. In doing so, we will negate much progress we've made towards balancing the desire for short-term economic growth versus longer-term goals and other valued uses of state land. Because biodiversity is the ultimate source for all renewable natural resources, maintaining healthy, diverse ecosystems should continue to be a fundamental goal for our state. Doing so enhances our promise of prosperity for future generations.

This letter has been signed by 133 Ph.D.-level scientists. Collectively, we have thousands of years of professional experience in natural science and resource management, have published thousands of peer-reviewed scientific articles, and we practice at every major research institution in the state of Michigan. Despite our varied backgrounds, research interests, and political affiliations, we are unified in our concern about the negative consequences SB 78 would have for managing Michigan's natural resources sustainably. We urge you to veto Senate Bill 78.

Sincerely,

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